Experiences from the Carey Campaign in Minnesota: How we won in 1991 How we can win again

By Gillian Furst

Ron Carey's election depended on lots of Teamster activists across the country applying their skills and dedication that eventually mounted the nationwide effort that won it for us in December 1991.

It involved the critical support of the national TDU office in Detroit, collaboration and key organizational support from the Carey campaign leadership, and plenty of good organization at the local level.

Carey won in '91 and he can do it again in '96.

In Minnesota, as elsewhere, the campaign divided itself into two distinct phases -- electing delegates to the International convention, and then after Ron's nomination, campaigning hard for him so that he was elected.

The first thing we did was set up a campaign committee. Bill Urman, who had not yet been elected secretary treasurer of his local, was the first campaign chairman of the Minnesota Campaign Committee.

We scheduled an initial visit by Ron to the Twin Cities. This included a public meeting along with campaigning at truck barns and plant gates. Ron likes this kind of campaigning. It also included scheduling newspaper interviews.

It's advisable to start planning early -- I would say at least two months ahead or more ahead of his visit. As you will see by my report, there will be lots to do, among them, picking a site for a main rally, printing leaflets, maybe having a cocktail party to raise additional money.

You will need a committee so folks are on board for thinking your campaign through well. And you will have to print thousands of leaflets announcing the main rally. You will have to organize leaflet barrages at the Teamster barns and plants. If you are like us there will be places where you have members who can saturate the shops and there will be other places where you have no one and you'll have to hustle out there yourselves, in some cases, experimenting until you learn when the shift changes are.

You will want Ron personally campaigning at some worksites. I suggest you analyze your area and pick the best barns or plant gates to visit, where there will be maximum turnout. Don't overload Ron. If you have a full day with him, I would think you would not want to do more than a half dozen events. This can be exhaustive stuff. Leave time for lunch, breaks, etc.

Make sure you pick good sites. In most areas, it would make good political sense to hit at least one UPS worksite, possibly two, one or more of the big freight terminals, and any other key job site. If you have two days, clearly you can do more. Make sure you

know the best times to have him at those sites. Go out there yourself if you aren't sure. There is no point in wasting his time at a bad site. Sure there will be mistakes but you want to minimize it.

Be sure and prepare a good logistics schedule so you leave sufficient travel time between sites and so everyone who needs to know, will know where you are going. Here's an imaginary one day itinerary:

Ron Carey visit to the Twin Cities, July 10-12, 1995

July 10

9:30 p.m.: Mike and Eric pick up Ron at Airport, take to Mark and Jean's house

July 11

Driver accompanying Ron all day: Rick. Also in Ron's car, Gillian.

7:30 a.m. UPS, Smith and Barnes St., Minneapolis

8:30 a.m. Coffee, Wagon Restaurant, 5th Av. and 4th St., Minneapolis

10 a.m. interview, Podunk Gazette, 234 France Av., Fridley

Noon Honeywell, Golden Valley, main gate on Duluth St.

1 p.m. Lunch, Mark and Jean's house, rest and phone interviews.

3:30 p.m. CF, main gate, 345 Spring Rd., Blaine, one mile west of 35W exit.

5:30 p.m. Cocktail party, 560 Summit Ave. St. Paul
(have a sandwich and fruit plate ready for Ron and campaign manager if they'd like it)

7:30 p.m. Rally, IAM hall, just off Como Av. Exit, take right, St. Paul

10 p.m. Take Ron to dinner or back to Mark and Jean's house if he'd prefer
(have food ready for Ron and campaign manager if they wants it)

July 12

Driver: Bill

6 a.m. Yellow Freight, just off Cliff Rd., Burnsville

8 a.m. Depart, Minneapolis St. Paul International Airport

Make sure you know who is driving the vehicle with Ron. Put him with your most dependable local people. Don't forget that you get a dependable, key supporter to make sure he is picked up at the airport and also dropped off. I underscore, dependable. This is no time to make mistakes. And make sure he has a comfortable and friendly home for him to stay at. Figure, also, he will be accompanied by someone, so you'll need two beds and hopefully two free bedrooms.

Also make sure that you can get as many activists out for each event with Ron when he visits the various plant gates. Encourage folks to take the day off if at all possible. You want to create a positive, supportive presence.

Also make sure you have plenty of campaign literature with you for the visit. In the first campaign there were ebbs and flows to the national literature so if there isn't enough, work with TDU to prepare some local material. Don't scrimp on the day of the visit. If he is going to be standing outside greeting up to 3,000 workers during his visit, have 4,500 pieces of literature on hand. Don't get caught short. It can be embarassing.

The media interviews are very important since many Teamsters won't see him in person. The press was very sympathetic the first time around, but there has been some

mean and untruthful coverage since the election, mainly planted by the old guard. But I have a hunch that coverage from city to city on his campaign swings will be pretty good. Ron presents a good image, and of course he and his reform position is on the side of the angels and it will impress reporters. Contact labor reporters in your area weeks in advance to set up interviews. Invite them out on this or that plant gate or freight barn visit, if they'd like, so they can get some "color" and a photo. Talk to the local TV station assignment directors, but I think, by-and-large, it is a "print" story. However, we had some luck getting Ron several radio news and interview shows. Also alert the media to the rally that you have. TV might shoot some news of it for the late news. Be sure and have a key person assigned to media.

We had two main visits by Ron. Both times the tour culminated in a rally. The first rally was held in a room in a pizza restaurant. The second was in a large hall rented from the International Association of the Machinists. Both were good locations, accessible to workers. Consider that when picking the hall. Both were union facilities. That's important, too. We don't want Ron being accused of staying or speaking at non-union facilities. If there are none in your area, that's a different story. But where there are such facilities, use them.

Two hours before the rally on his second visit here we had a cocktail party reception at the house of a prominent friend and sent invitations asking $25 per person. We raised quite a bit of money that way and we had wine, beer pop and hors d'oerves. Ron spoke briefly.

Think carefully through the agenda for your rally. At both rallies we had someone give a fund pitch. It's important to put envelopes on the seats along with a little piece of paper, saying I pledge $25, $50 or $100 or other. The fund pitch is important and should be thought through. Also have a good person chairing the meeting. Remember, many Teamsters may be hearing Ron for the first time and we want to present a professional image.

Here are some other suggestions when you are planning your rally. Be sure all your key Teamster activists get mailed a leaflet. Mailing lists vary, but hopefully you and others in TDU have been developing such lists. Those will be the backbone of the rally attendees. But there is another group out there who supports Ron. These are progressive trade unionists from other unions. They have been reading about his reforms and a lot of them will want to come and hear him -- and make contributions. If you have access to such lists, use them. If you don't, it would make sense to sit down and start thinking through the people you should invite and getting their addresses. One suggestion: Labor Notes may be able to help you. Many of the best labor activists in the country are Labor Notes subscribers so see if you can either wangle their list of names for your area, or have them send out a flyer to those people.

A few more miscellaneous points. We want good, professional looking flyers, hopefully with a picture of Ron, so get one of your local computer wizzes or artists to help you, for free, or your local union printer. The TDU office is another good resource. Be sure and put a phone number on it. Also, as far as contributions, remember, no employer contributions accepted.

We had five locals from Minnesota that elected delegates to the international convention.

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Minnesota Carey Campaign

Our slate in Local 1145 at Honeywell and Alliant won. We picked a good slate of rank-and-filers and stewards. They were rock hard. We didn't want people who might be for Carey or might not. We called it the Ron Carey Slate because we wanted folks to be absolutely clear that when they were voting for us, they were voting for Ron Carey. In some areas you have officers who support Carey and where-ever possible they need to be on the slate.

We raised plenty of money in our delegate election race, holding a garage sale and fundraising parties, hitting up friends, relatives, etc. We did a complete mailing with an attractive leaflet explaining the issues. We ended up buying a bulk mail permit. We had great help from national TDU in assembling the material we wanted to use with terrific design support from Marilyn. We had a big picture of Ron and pictures of each delegate candidate. We saturated the plants with several different leaflets.

We also did something that I'm quite proud of....I think we were the first in the Carey campaign nationally to do it. It was phonebanking.

We have two phones in our house. We installed three other phones, got the lists of members, looked up phone numbers and got on the phones and called thousands of members urging them to vote for Carey. We had a little short typewritten spiel that worked well and we got all our Teamster friends and supporters to come in and help us. We borrowed phone books and reverse directories to look up numbers and over a three week period we had a real system going. Three additional phones for three weeks cost us about $300. And it paid off. We won!

The Minnesota Carey Campaign Committee and Minnesota TDU chapter gave support and help to other campaign committees in other locals. Some local campaigns were quite autonomous and were able to do it all themselves. Other committees needed help and used the phones out of our house. We were also lucky in lining up a slate in one local where we had only a single contact. And the slate won two of three slots. So it is worth it to hunt around and see what kind of pro-Carey people we can get in any local. Unlike a local election, it is not so important to have candidates with "experience." We found that members did not mind voting for rank-and-filers.

It is likely that our literature will want to play up the potential danger if the old guard with its mob ties gets a majority at the convention and what it will do to Carey's reforms and union democracy. We will want to play up Carey's accomplishments.

After the delegate elections, Mike Laselett came into Minneapolis, we rented a hall at a union hotel and had a two-day regional conference where all the delegates in the region had training on how to handle things when they came to the convention. It was very worthwhile.

The second phase -- the general election -- was really a massive repeat effort, with a visit by Ron, a rally, a fund raiser, media interviews, new leaflets to be made and distributed massively. It was hard work. Unlike the old guard, all of us were holding down real jobs so we had to do it in our spare time. We'll have that situation again.

One of our most successful efforts was the phonebanking. There are something like 40,000 or so Teamsters in Minnesota, and we literally telephoned more than 10,000 of them. What we did was get the use of the basement den of one of our most loyal activists. We installed five telephones. We had one coordinator who came down every night at 6 p.m. and we phoned from 6 to 9 p.m., Monday through Friday, then from 10 a.m. to 4

p.m. on Saturday and from noon to 6 p.m. on Sunday. The coordinator spent most of his time giving volunteers phone lists to call, keeping things in order, keeping the coffee pot humming and the pretzel bowl full, and calling for future nights to line up volunteers, as well as calling the next night's volunteers to remind them they were scheduled. We did this for five solid weeks. More than 50 Teamsters and supporters from other unions volunteered their time. We concentrated on the locals where we were the strongest. That's invariably where you are going to get your most votes, election strategists told us. So that's what we did. After we had thoroughly called those locals, we then started calling into locals where we had much less presence but had some contacts. Every local that we targeted by phone went for Carey, even some where the other side campaigned hard.

This phonebanking will be important again because the international election will be a mail ballot once again, and hundreds of thousands of Teamsters will be taking their ballots, putting them on their mantle pieces or in their bills boxex, and forgetting about them, until we call them and remind them that it is important to vote for Carey. The call need not be heavy-handed, but it should not be apolitical. There should be a short point to make. Most likely it will be something along the line that the mob is trying to get back in and Carey has made great strides, turning it around, making the union more democratic, cutting out the fat salaries and turning the union over to the membership.

These are some guiding ideas.

We won in '91 and TDUers were the backbone. We can and will do it again in '96.